



Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony

Held on 26 February 2022

SMC held its Pledge Affirmation Ceremony virtually on 26 February 2022. The Pledge ceremony marks an important milestone in the career of a doctor who is at the threshold of obtaining full registration. The Pledge is a solemn oath which reminds doctors of their duties and responsibilities to patients and society.

SMC was honoured to have Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Second Minister for Health as the Guest-of-Honour for the event. More than 220 provisionally- and conditionally-registered doctors took the Pledge which was witnessed by members of the Medical Council and invited guests from the medical professional bodies, medical schools and Chairman of Medical Boards of hospitals.

Speech by Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Second Minister for Health



In Singapore, our healthcare system is a key part of our Social Compact – one where the Government creates an enabling environment for all Singaporeans... protecting them against the vicissitudes of life, such as a health shock.

It is my great honour to join you today. The affirmation of the Physician's Pledge is a significant milestone for our medical professionals – marking the start of your journey in fully registered clinical practice.

As you recite the Physician's Pledge, you will affirm your commitment to saving and improving patients' lives and to practise medicine with passion and integrity. The values you pledge to uphold are the same values that we recognise as distinctives of a good doctor.

Today's ceremony is particularly momentous. We are in the midst of the biggest crisis of our time. The healthcare family has been at the forefront of the pandemic – fighting tirelessly to overcome wave after wave of COVID-19 infections, be it Delta or Omicron. Many of you served at the frontlines, under difficult conditions – adhering to tight safety precautions, donning the PPE for long hours, attending to anxious patients and their family members. I know it has not been easy, but you persevered, providing the best quality care to your patients, despite the many challenges and stressful environment. The deep sense of professionalism exhibited by the healthcare fraternity has provided Singaporeans with assurance through the crisis. To this end, I would like to convey my deepest appreciation to all of you, and to your family and loved ones for supporting you throughout these difficult times. Thank you for keeping all of us safe.

Doctor's Role in Our Healthcare System and Social Compact

In Singapore, our healthcare system is a key part of our Social Compact – one where the Government creates an enabling environment for all Singaporeans by providing access to affordable, quality healthcare, education, and housing for all Singaporeans. Together with a caring community, we provide additional support to uplift Singaporeans in need, for example, through the MediFund and subsidies for MediShield Life, which ensure that healthcare remains affordable and accessible for low-income Singaporeans – protecting them against the vicissitudes of life, such as a health shock.

But our work must also go upstream. Prevention is key – before medical conditions worsen. This is also where I see room for tighter social-health integration – as many presenting health and medical issues are often co-morbid with social determinants. This work will become even more challenging, as our population ages and our healthcare needs grow. In his Budget speech on 18 February 2022, Minister Lawrence Wong shared that healthcare costs will become a major driver of social spending in the coming decade. Like he said, this trajectory is not sustainable, and we must therefore fundamentally rethink the way we deliver healthcare. A key aspect is bringing care closer to the community, with the support of a strong primary care system. As I mentioned earlier, this will enable us to go upstream for preventive care and better manage chronic conditions. In turn, this will reduce the chances of costlier downstream complications in the longer term and enable our hospitals to focus on the most complex cases.

As doctors, you play a key role in our healthcare system and our broader social support system for Singaporeans. Not only do you provide direct care to your patients, but you are also responsible for delivering public health education, for example, counselling your patients regarding their conditions and potential complications. Society places a great deal of trust in you and your advice, just as we have seen during the pandemic, when the medical community stepped up - correcting misconceptions and disinformation on COVID-19 and its vaccines. This trust must never be taken for granted.

Implementation of the MRA (Amendment) Act

While most physicians are committed to provide their patients with the best care and highest standards, we recognise there are some who have failed in this regard. The disciplinary processes within the Medical Registration Act (MRA) protect the public against such acts and preserve the reputation of the profession. Over the past year, the Singapore Medical Council and MOH have been working tirelessly to refine the MRA and to put in place necessary enforcement frameworks.

To this end, I am pleased to announce that the new Medical Registration (Amendment) Act (MRAA) will come into force this year. Under the MRAA, we will establish a new Disciplinary Commission. It will oversee the procedures and processes of Disciplinary Tribunals. SMC has also completed its Complaints Panel nomination exercise and will share more details in due course. I would like to take the opportunity to extend my appreciation to senior doctors who have stepped forward to serve on the Disciplinary Commission and the Complaints Panel.

Closing

In closing, whether you have just embarked on your medical career, or have been practising for some years, I urge you to hold fast to your commitment and calling. During these trying times, we must look out for each other and not leave anyone behind. I am confident that we will overcome the pandemic together, as a healthcare family, and as a nation.

Congratulations once again on reaching this important milestone. I wish everyone the very best ahead, and a fulfilling career.

Thank you.



Address by Professor Chee Yam Cheng, President of SMC



Good afternoon. On behalf of the Singapore Medical Council, I warmly welcome Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Second Minister for Health and our Guest of Honour, our distinguished guests and our colleagues who are taking the Pledge today.

Continuing battle against COVID-19 pandemic

For the past two years, we have been fighting the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic. When Singapore exited the Stabilization Phase and moved into the Transition Phase in November 2021, many of us had hoped that we will progress to a new normal and live with COVID-19 when it becomes endemic. But now, the new Omicron variant has surged around the world. It is now circulating within our community but seems to be milder in severity.

More than one century ago, the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919, also known as the Spanish flu killed more than 50 million people and was estimated to have infected more than 500 million people. The pandemic started in the spring of 1918 and occurred in waves around the globe. The world was far less interconnected back then. By the winter of 1920 it became less virulent. It was only many years later that the gene of the virus was eventually sequenced.

Today, being far more advanced in medical science and knowledge, the world has reacted much faster. The coronavirus was successfully sequenced within weeks and highly accelerated vaccine trials were commenced within months. This was unprecedented. We now have the vaccines to reduce and prevent serious illness and fatalities. Morbidity and mortality from COVID-19 have been greatly reduced.

You must have heard many accounts of the online disinformation about COVID-19 vaccination. Advice and information that doctors give must be accurate within the context of ethical medical practice. Ethical practice is based on evidence and science. In the SMC's Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines (ECEG), there is a section on Good Medical Practice which states "Patients expect doctors to offer only treatments or therapies that will benefit them while minimizing harm... You must treat patients only according to generally accepted methods based on a balance of available evidence and accepted best practice". Indeed we must first do no harm. And we must actively prevent harm by reaching out to our patients to advise and explain why vaccination and public health measures are critical to combat COVID-19, knowing the evidence of highly credible scientific studies and the experience in affected communities and countries.

Ethics and Duty

The training of a doctor today is more structured, more organised and more complex and this is in tandem with the complexity and specialisation of medical practice. Many facets of the doctor's personality and practice are witnessed by patients. Your patient sees your approachability, your kindness and compassion. He sees your skill, your knowledge and the way you communicate information to him. He sees how you manage his disease and problems in his context. He sees your ability to treat the whole person amidst his fears and anxieties. He looks forward to your empathy as you deliver compassionate and appropriate care.

Being in the frontline, let us also look out for each other and render mental and psychological support to one another. We need boosters too, of encouragement and empathy... Each of us plays a vital role in protecting and supporting the overall system in our interconnected healthcare system.



Doctors affirm the Pledge at the Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony

While you learn the art and science of Medicine and hone your skills to become good doctors, you must remain grounded on the bed rock of ethical medical practice outlined in the ECEG. Ethics and professionalism are competencies by themselves and it is a fact that SMC requires its supervisors in the medical institutions to assess all conditionally registered doctors on these traits. Today, as you recite the Physician's Pledge, you will be reminded of the foundation and fundamental reasons of your work and calling.

Review of Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines

The ECEG provides all of us with the guiding principles to maintain the right ethical conduct throughout our life as doctors. The ECEG, which was last revised in 2016, keeps pace with the changing clinical environment and emerging ethical issues. The application of the ECEG may change as new situations, treatments and guidelines emerge but the fundamental principles remain unchanged. The 2016 edition of the ECEG and Handbook on Medical Ethics are readily accessible through SMC's website. Please read it to navigate the complex and dynamic medical environment so that you can always practise in an ethical and professional way.

Learning as a doctor

One of the key roles of SMC is to maintain a Continuing Medical Education (CME) regulatory system which will make our doctors more competent and safer. As a doctor, manage CME in a systematic manner so that your learning and education are planned and appropriate to your practice. The CME system is to make you a better practitioner. SMC is in the process of refining the CME structure to ensure that it stays relevant and benefits the practitioner.

Involvement in the Professional Bodies

We have built on a foundation of generations of doctors and leaders, many of whom are currently still serving important roles in our profession and society. Today, we are also joined by leaders from the three professional bodies, the Academy of Medicine Singapore, the College of Family Physicians Singapore and the Singapore Medical Association. At every Pledge ceremony, I encourage colleagues to join our professional bodies, to be constantly in contact with the fraternity and the academic and professional learning they espouse, and the values and mission they stand for.

Self-regulation

I would like to emphasise that the medical profession is a self-regulated one administered by doctors who go above and beyond their call of duty by volunteering their time to serve. I am heartened that SMC has had exceptional and highly committed Council members, and we hope this legacy will continue in the years to come. The work of self-regulation is not easy, and we cannot be disinterested in it. I laud our colleagues for their time and sacrifice. Without them, we would not have the strong regulating body that is SMC today. I hope that you will step forward and volunteer to serve when called upon.

Being in the frontline, let us also look out for each other and render mental and psychological support to one another. We need boosters too, of encouragement and empathy. To our colleagues we express our appreciation for your sacrifices and contributions during these trying times. Each of us plays a vital role in protecting and supporting the overall system in our interconnected healthcare system.

Closing

On this note, I congratulate you on achieving this milestone in your medical career. My best wishes for a successful journey in the years ahead. Thank you.